

Message Text

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72

ACTION NEA-12

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R 041528 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1459

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

USINT BAGHDAD

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, KU, IZ

SUBJ: 'ARAFAT' S " MEDIATION" BETWEEN IRAQ AND KUWAIT

1. IF ANY FURTHER PROOF WERE NEED OF YASIR 'ARAFAT' S EXCEPTIONAL ABILITIES AS MANUEVERER, OPPORTUNIST AND POLITICAL HOUDINI IN TRICKY WORLD OF FEDAYEEN AND ARAB POLITICS, ANALYSIS OF HIS BEHAVIOR IN CONNECTION WITH IRAQ- KUWAIT BORDER CRISIS CERTAINLY PROVIDES IT. COMING AT MOMENT WHEN HIS STOCK AND THAT OF FATAH WAS AT NEW LOW WITH MANY MODERATE ARAB STATES, AND WHEN KUWAIT AND SAUDI ARABIA SEEMED BE CONSIDERING REDUCTION OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT, 'ARAFAT IMMEDIATELY SEIZED UPON KUWAIT- IRAQ DISPUTE AS OPPORTUNITY REFURBISH HIS IMAGE AND INGRATiate HIMSELF WITH KUWAIT AND POSSIBLY OTHER MODERATE ARAB STATES.

2. LETTING IT BE KNOWN LOUDLY THAT HIS INTENTION WAS TO ACT AS MEDIATOR, 'ARAFAT FLEW OFF TO BAGHDAD MAR 27 FOR TALKS WITH PRES AL BAKR, CONTINUED ON TO KUWAIT MAY 29 AND RETURNED

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TO BAGHDAD NEXT DAY. ARRIVING BACK IN BEIRUT MAR 31, HE WAS QUOTED SAYING HIS EFFORTS HAD DRAWN FAVORABLE RESPONSES FROM BOTH SIDES AND THAT HE WAS "VERY OPTIMISTIC" ABOUT EVENTUALLY ARRANGING AMICABLE SETTLEMENT. LOCAL PRESS REPORTS, FED BY PALESTINIAN SOURCES HERE AND IN KUWAIT, ARE CLAIMING 'ARAFAT'S EFFORTS HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR ALLEGED IRAQI PROMISE TO SEND OFFICIAL DEL TO KUWAIT ON APR 6 TO DISCUSS CRISIS AND, IN MEAN-TIME, TO WITHDRAW IRAQI FORCES FROM DISPUTED ZONE. JUDGING FROM PRESS REPORTS OUT OF BAGHDAD, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT GOI ALSO DELIBERATELY TOSSED CREDIT 'ARAFAT'S WAY IN ORDER ENHANCE HIS STANDING.

3. AT LAST REPORT, 'ARAFAT WAS SAID TO BE AGAIN SHUTTling BACK AND FORTH BETWEEN TALKS WITH IRAQI AND KUWAITI OFFICIALS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE CAPITALS, AIDED BY FEDAYEEN DEL COMPOSED OF FATAH'S MAHMOUD ABBAS (ABU MAZIN) IN BAGHDAD AND KHALID AL HASSAN AND ABU AL ABID IN KUWAIT (ABBAS REPORTEDLY JOINED THEM THERE APR 3). THEY ARE DESCRIBED AS EXUDING "TOTAL OPTIMISM" THAT SOLUTION TO CRISIS IS "IMMINENT", ADDING THAT ABU AMMAR IS NOW TRYING ARRANGE SUMMIT MEETING BETWEEN AL BAKR AND AMIR OF KUWAIT. SUDDEN RE- EMERGENCE OF KHALID AL HASSAN AS APPARENT CLOSE CONFIDANT AND FRIEND OF 'ARAFAT (AND, IN SOME PRESS REPORTS, AS "NUMBER THREE MAN IN FATAH") IS FASCINATING. AT THE PNC MEETING IN CAIRO, 'ARAFAT SIDED WITH SALAH KHALAF AND OTHER EXTREMIST LEADERS TO PURGE AL HASSAN FROM PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (BEIRUT 613). IN AFTERMATH KHARTOUM, 'ARAFAT OBVIOUSLY RECOGNIZED AL HASSAN COMMANDS PROBABLY MORE INFLUENCE AND RESPECTABILITY WITH SAUDIS AND KUWAITIS THAN ANY OTHER FEDAYEEN LEADER. RESULT: INSTANT REHABILITATION.

4. COMMENT: 'ARAFAT'S MEDIATION EFFORT IS CLEARLY ONE MORE STEP IN SOFT- SOAP OPERATION BEGUN IN RIYADH, KHARTOUM AND OTHER ARAB CAPITALS TO COUNTER ANTI- FATAH SENTIMENT GENERATED BY KHARTOUM INCIDENT. IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF KUWAITIS AND OTHERS ARE IMPRESSED BY HIS SKILLFUL ACT. BUFFUM

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